

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters
September 10, 2009

The President. Hello, everybody. We just had an excellent and informative Cabinet meeting. Secretaries Clinton and Gates provided an overview of our current national security posture. Secretary Geithner discussed some of the—both promise and peril of our current economic situation. But we spent a large portion of our time discussing the critical importance of health care reform.

This is an issue that touches on all of the agencies that are represented at this table. Hilda Solis at the Department of Labor understands that it is very difficult for workers to obtain raises of any significance if increased productivity is all going into increased health care costs. Gary Locke at the Department of Commerce is constantly hearing stories from businesses, small and large alike, about ever escalating premiums and the need to get control of our health care costs. Bob Gates—one of the biggest parts of his budget is—are his health care costs.

And so we all understand that this is an issue that the country is ready to deal with. As I said last night, I am confident the plan that we've put forward is the right plan for the American people. I continue to be open to suggestions and ideas from all quarters: House Members, Senate Members, Democrats, Republicans, outside groups. What we cannot do is stand pat. What we can't do is accept a status quo that is bankrupting families, businesses, and our Nation.

I will not tolerate us continuing to pay more for less in health care. The time is right, and we are going to move aggressively to get this done. And every member of this Cabinet is invested. And I want to particularly thank Secretary Sebelius and my health care team for the extraordinary work that they've done getting us this far. But this administration understands that this is important for all of our agencies, all of our constituencies, and we are going to make a full-court press in the coming month to make sure that we go ahead and get this done for the American people.

All right?

Representative Joe Wilson of South Carolina/Health Care Debate

Q. Do you accept Wilson's apology, sir?

The President. Yes, I do. I'm a big believer that we all make mistakes. He apologized quickly and without equivocation, and I'm appreciative of that.

I do think that, as I said last night, we have to get to the point where we can have a conversation about big, important issues that matter to the American people without vitriol, without name-calling, without the assumption of the worst in other people's motives.

We are all Americans; we all want to do best for our country. We've got different ideas, but for the most part, we have the same aims, which is to make sure that people who work hard in this country and who act responsibly are able to get good jobs, good wages, raise their families, make sure those kids have a good education; that they are protected from misfortune or accident by having health care and retirement security in place; want to keep people safe, and that's why our national security team is so important.

Our goals are generally the same, whether we're Democrats or Republicans, and in fact, most Americans don't even think about those labels all that much. They are turned off when they see people using wild accusations, false claims, name-calling, sharply ideological approaches to solve the problems. They want pragmatism; they want people to stay focused on the job. And I hope that some of the fever breaks a little bit.

The media can always be helpful by not giving all the attention to the loudest or shrillest voices and try to stay a little bit more focused on the issues at hand. All right?

Q. Will you talk with him if he decides to call you?

The President. Oh, I talk to everybody.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Absolutely.

All right? Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:24 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; Secretary of the Treasury Timothy F. Geithner; Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis; Secretary of Commerce Gary F. Locke; and Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Cabinet meetings; Interviews With the News Media : Exchange with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Gates, Robert M.; Geithner, Timothy F.; Locke, Gary F.; Sebelius, Kathleen; Solis, Hilda L.; Wilson, Addison G. "Joe".

Subjects: Cabinet : Members, meetings with President; Commerce, Department of : Secretary; Congress : Bipartisanship; Defense and national security : Potential terrorist attacks, preparedness efforts; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Health and Human Services, Department of : Secretary; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Labor, Department of : Secretary; State, Department of : Secretary; Treasury, Department of the : Secretary.

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